Memo

To: EEPAC

From: Environmental & Parks Planning (E&PP)

Date: November 29, 2016

RE: City Responses (November 2016) to EEPAC's Comments on Draft Ecological Restoration Plan for Westminster Ponds / Pond Mills ESA Saunders Cabin Area by St. Williams Nursery & Ecology Centre – September 2016

E&PP and St. Williams Nursery & Ecology Centre thank EEPAC for their review of the Draft Ecological Restoration Plan for Westminster Ponds / Pond Mills ESA Saunders Cabin Area by St. Williams Nursery & Ecology Centre, September 2016.

EEPAC Working Group Comments on Ecological Restoration Plan for Westminster Ponds/Pond Mills ESA

Working Group: Nimalka Weerasuriya, Erick Arellano, Joseph Stinziano

Regarding: 'TAGs viewing opportunity model would restore open woodland or savanna with native moist wet meadow species (grasses sedges and wildflowers) between realigned trail section and wetland edge zone (4).' (pg 8)
Regarding: 'Heavy equipment restricted to areas of low habitat sensitivity to limit erosion impacts.' (pg 10)
Regarding: 'Regions where ecological sensitive features are present (Saunders Pond or retainable native plants/communities), basal bark and manual removal with chainsaws or less intrusive methods (weed wrench) will be used' (pg 10)
Regarding: 'American toads – burrow beneath frost line and will not be impacted' (pg 15)
Regarding: 'The wetland edge is a band running 3 to 5 metres in width along the south shore of the pond' (pg 8)

Comment: What is the size of the 'buffer zone' between the edge of the Pond outwards that will be restricted to hand weeding and basal bark applications and not heavy machinery?

City Response: *Any Buckthorn and dead ash found within 10 meters of the south shore of Saunders Pond will be removed using the less intrusive methods noted on page 10, "In areas where ecological sensitive features are present (e.g., in close proximity to Saunders Pond or around retainable native plants or plant communities) we will use basal bark treatment and manual removal with chainsaws or by other less intrusive methods (e.g., weed wrench)."*

Regarding: Figure 1

Comment: Will there be future maintenance requirements in the MEMM4 site (future Bur Oak savanna) for viewing points along the proposed path?

City Response: *Yes, the City will coordinate with the ESA team to maintain the savannah habitat, likely through periodic prescribed burns, and also as noted on page 11, "Long term monitoring and management to prevent re-invasion will be required as buckthorn can be re-introduced by birds and small mammals which eat the buckthorn berries that are prevalent throughout the City."*

Regarding: 'The wetland edge has ephemeral drainage channels' (pg 20)'

Comment: Will the continued growth of grasses/sedges/wildflowers limit the movement of water via ephemeral streams to the pond over time?

City Response: *Care will be taken to protect local drainage patterns within the ESA.*

Regarding: Funding

Comment: Are sufficient funds allocated to achieve the monitoring and adaptive management programs? What is an approximate cost breakdown?

City Response: *Yes, adaptive management is required to ensure that this will be a successful, showcase project for the City demonstrating London's commitment to excellence in ecological restoration, biodiversity conservation, stewardship and education in a high profile location. A minimum of 5k per year will be reserved and directed towards monitoring and control of buckthorn re-sprouts in the restoration area for at least the next 5 years.*

Regarding: 'All machinery and equipment will be inspected and cleaned in accordance with the Clean Equipment Protocol:' (pg 16)

Comment: Will an ecologist be regularly present to ensure proper Clean Equipment Protocols are followed?

City Response: *Yes, project ecologists and/or members of the City funded UTRCA ESA team will be present and ensure the protocol is followed.*

Regarding: 'Potential Risks – Bats: no hibernacula present in restoration area or within the ESA, and will not be affected. Large trees that require management will be inspected (cavity search) by qualified personnel' (pg. 14):

Comment: Will it be possible to add in bat boxes/hibernacula on suitable habitats after successful forest regeneration to promote the future use of this area by bats?

City Response: *Yes and we are happy to include bat boxes in the restoration project area.*

Regarding: Table 1 (pg 13):

Comment: Readjustment of time frame (Table 1) to reflect delays in scheduling – shift to fall/winter of 2017 instead of 2016

City Response: *The ecological restoration process will begin this winter.*

Regarding: 'Use of Habitat and conditions described in the Westminster Ponds/Pond Mills ESA: Ecological Inventory & Management Zone Report Volume 1 by North South Environmental (NSE), and includes and Volume 2 reports on the Hydrological Investigation; Water Quality Monitoring and Paleolimnology Study to base planting decisions' (pg 3)

Comment: No copy of these Volumes were given to EEPAC and we cannot provide detailed comments on the Plan

City Response: *The findings of the NSE reports were integrated into the restoration plan as noted by St. Williams Nursery and Ecology Centre (SWNEC) on page 6, "In preparation for the ecological restoration works the comprehensive field inventories examining natural communities, wildlife, and invasive species in the 2015 Volume 1 and 2 reports by North South Environmental (NSE) were reviewed ...". EEPAC provided comments on the 2015 Volume 1 and 2 reports in 2014/2015 and EEPAC's comments were addressed and the reports are available on the City website. https://www.london.ca/residents/Environment/Natural-Environments/Pages/Conservation-Plans.aspx*

Miscellaneous comments:

Comment: A walk through beyond the restoration area showed a substantial number of mature (10+ yr.) buckthorn trees and seedlings still present in the understory.
What steps will be taken to mitigate buckthorn encroachment beyond the approximate restoration area? Will there be consideration made in assessing areas south-east of the restoration zone to further remove nonnatives in the future?

City Response: *Yes, the approach used to manage buckthorn in the restoration area and for the ESA as a whole is described on page 11:*

"Long term monitoring and management to prevent re-invasion will be required as buckthorn can be re-introduced by birds and small mammals which eat the buckthorn berries that are prevalent throughout the City. The laxative properties of the berries helps to spread them widely.

It is worth noting that The Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) ESA team have managed buckthorn primarily through basal bark application of Garlon RTU as part of operational and capital projects, funded by the City, in the ESA since 2008 including the buckthorn in the Rotary/UTRCA restoration area noted on Figure 1. In 2014 - 2016 woody invasives including buckthorn were managed in the landfill meadow to protect habitat for Meadowlarks a Threatened Species at Risk. In 2014 - 2016 buckthorn around Spettigue Pond were treated to protect many rare species and their habitats. Buckthorn was managed on the northeast shore of Saunders Pond in 2015. This approach is generally consistent with the North South Environmental 2015 report that prioritizes protection of SAR and rare species from buckthorn infestation, then to treat the areas of least infestation to protect them, moving to then manage the remainder of the denser stands of buckthorn in the ESA as funds and opportunities such as this ecological restoration project arise."

Recommend: Implementation of additional signage along newly made trails and boardwalk to maintain the dogs on leash policy (owner and off-leash dog was seen during the walk-through)

City Response: *Thank you for the recommendation we will work to implement additional signage.*